
1. How's the state of your memory?

2. Talk about techniques to improve the memory—the PAO system and the Memory Palace. How do they work? Have you attempted to use either technique to improve your own memory? What are some of the lurid objects...or houses you would use to recall objects you want to remember?

3. How important is memory to us today when our culture provides so many other ways of recalling information: our ability to write, printed texts, photos, computers, and smart phones?

4. In the ancient world, learning was memorizing. How would you characterize today's learning? What role does memory play in acquiring knowledge? Were the students Foer visited in the South Bronx learning history or memorizing it...or both?

5. Talk about the way memory shapes our identities and perceptions of the world. How does it do so?

6. How does Foer react when he wins the U.S. Memory Championship? Did it fulfill his hopes and ideals of what an improved memory would bring him?

7. What do you think of Foer's coach, Ed Cooke? What about his philosophy that "a heroic person should be able to withstand about 10 years of solitary confinement without getting terribly annoyed"?

8. Talk about Ribot's Law—the process of integrating memories into the brain's network. Does that law seem to hold true for your brain?

9. What is the role of memory in our culture and why does Foer say it is eroding at an ever faster pace? How serious a problem is this national amnesia...if, in fact, that's what it is?

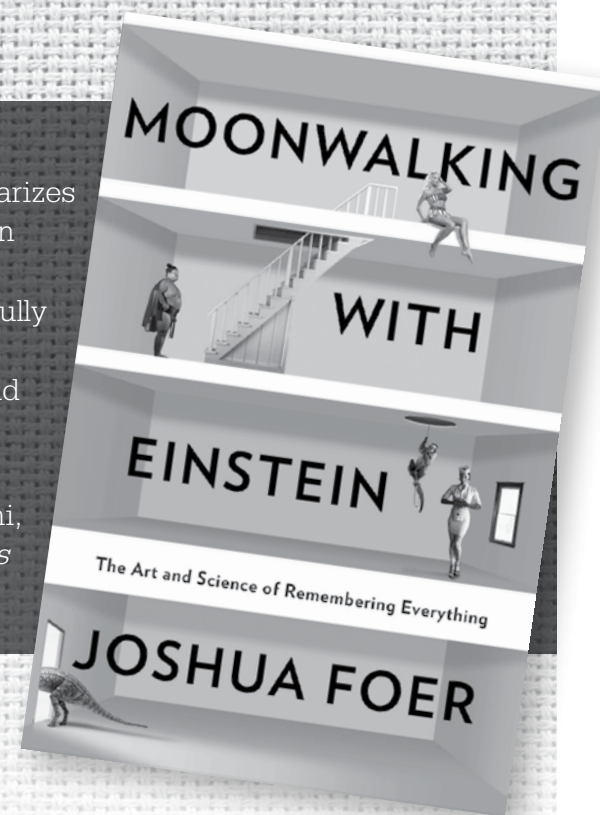
10. Foer says that in the process of learning to memorize, he also learned "to pay attention to the world around" him. Are you keenly aware of your surroundings? How much attention do you pay to the world around you?

11. What did you find funny in the book? What was most interesting?

Discussion Questions

Joshua Foer "popularizes scientific concepts in a breezy, accessible fashion while cheerfully dispensing some practical insights and lots of entertaining anecdotes."

— Michiko Kakutani,
The New York Times



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Joshua Foer is a freelance journalist living in New Haven, CT, USA, with a primary focus on science. He was the 2006 USA Memory Champion, which he described in his 2011 book, ***Moonwalking with Einstein***. Foer is the younger brother of New Republic editor Franklin Foer and novelist Jonathan Safran Foer. He is the son of Esther Foer, president of a public relations firm, and Albert Foer, a think-tank president.

He was born in Washington, D.C., and attended Georgetown Day School. He graduated from Yale

University, where he lived in Silliman College, in 2004. Foer is married to Dinah Herlands, a medical student at Yale, whom he met while an undergraduate at Yale.

Foer published his first book, ***Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything***, in 2011. He received a \$1.2 million advance for the book when he was 24. Film rights were optioned by Columbia Pictures shortly after publication.

In 2006, Foer won the USA Memory Championship, and set a new record in the “speed cards” event by memorizing a deck of 52 cards in 1 minute and 40 seconds. [4] ***Moonwalking with Einstein*** describes Foer’s journey from participatory journalist to national champion mnemonist, under the tutelage of British Grand Master of Memory, Ed Cooke.

Foer’s work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Slate*, and *The Nation*. In 2007, the quarterly art & culture journal *Cabinet* began publishing Foer’s column “A Minor History Of.” The column examines an overlooked cultural phenomenon using a timeline.

Foer has organized several websites and organizations based on his interests. He created the Athanasius Kircher Society which had only one session featuring Kim Peek and Joseph Kittinger. He is the co-founder, along with Dylan Thurau, of the Atlas Obscura—an online compendium of “The World’s Wonders, Curiosities, and Esoterica.” He is also a co-organizer of Sukkah City—an architectural design competition planned in partnership with New York City’s Union Square Park in 2010. (From Wikipedia.)

Book Summary

Foer’s unlikely journey from chronically forgetful science journalist to US Memory Champion frames a revelatory exploration of the vast, hidden impact of memory on every aspect of our lives.

On average, people squander forty days annually compensating for things they’ve forgotten. Joshua Foer used to be one of those people. But after a year of memory training, he found himself in the finals of the U.S. Memory Championship. Even more important, Foer found a vital truth we too often forget: In every way that matters, we are the sum of our memories.

Moonwalking with Einstein draws on cutting-edge research, a surprising cultural history of memory, and venerable tricks of the mentalist’s trade to transform our understanding of human remembering. Under the tutelage of top “mental athletes,” he learns ancient techniques once employed by Cicero to memorize his speeches and by Medieval scholars to memorize entire books. Using methods that have been largely forgotten, Foer discovers that we can all dramatically improve our memories.

Immersing himself obsessively in a quirky subculture of competitive memorizers, Foer learns to apply techniques that call on imagination as much as determination—showing that memorization can be anything but rote. From the PAO system, which converts numbers into lurid images, to the memory palace, in which memories are stored in the rooms of imaginary structures, Foer’s experience shows that the World Memory Championships are less a test of memory than of perseverance and creativity.

Foer takes his inquiry well beyond the arena of mental athletes—across the country and deep into his own mind. In San Diego, he meets an affable old man with one of the most severe cases of amnesia on record, where he learns that memory is at once more elusive and more reliable than we might think. In Salt Lake City, he swaps secrets with a savant who claims to have memorized more than nine thousand books. At a high school in the South Bronx, he finds a history teacher using twenty-five-hundred-year-old memory techniques to give his students an edge in the state Regents exam.

At a time when electronic devices have all but rendered our individual memories obsolete, Foer’s bid to resurrect the forgotten art of remembering becomes an urgent quest. *Moonwalking with Einstein* brings Joshua Foer to the apex of the US Memory Championship and readers to a profound appreciation of a gift we all possess but that too often slips our minds. (From the publisher.)